

Killaloe Diocese Faith Gathering: 13 – 15 September 2013

Summary & Recommendations

Introduction

The inaugural Faith Gathering in Killaloe Diocese took place in Ennis, Co. Clare from the 13th – 15th September 2013. At Bishop Kieran's request, the 3-day event was held to mark the Year of Faith, the Year of the Gathering, and above all as an event to nourish and encourage the people of the Diocese of Killaloe in their faith. On Friday 13th September, Dr Ruth Patterson was the keynote speaker to address the gathering at the Cathedral in Ennis. The evening also saw the launch of the new Pastoral Plan for the Diocese, entitled 'Builders of Hope'.

This short paper will summarise the evaluation by participants of the weekend and provide recommendations from the Steering Committee which might help inform further diocesan initiatives in the future.

Saturday 14th September – St. Flannan's College

The activities of Day 2 of the Faith Gathering took place at St. Flannan's College in Ennis. The activities included a morning keynote speaker – Dr. Dermot Ryan who delivered an input on being a person of Faith in Ireland today. This was followed by a choice of 26 workshops which were attended by approximately 550 delegates from across the Diocese. The various workshops covered a diverse range of matters, from Non-Eucharistic Liturgies to Finding God in the Movies, from Godly Play to Sacred Dance.

Alongside the Adult Gathering, a Youth Gathering also took place organised by the Diocesan Youth Forum which drew approximately 55 young people.

Delegates had the opportunity to attend a second workshop of their choosing in the afternoon, followed by a further Keynote Speaker, Ms. Breda O'Brien, a teacher, committed lay-person and a weekly columnist for the *Irish Times*. Finally the day's proceedings were brought to a close by a Taize Prayer Service hosted by the young people who participated in the Youth Gathering event.

The environment of St. Flannan's College was enriched with the addition of 12 Sacred Spaces prepared by Clusters and suitable as a backdrop for the key liturgical events in the Church Year. Artistic displays added to the sense of beauty and creativity along with the

displays by many organisations providing inspiration and resources for all who had taken time out to attend the Faith Gathering.

Delegates attending the Saturday programme were invited to complete evaluation surveys. In all over 270 responded (circa 50% of attendees).

Key points emerging from analysis of the responses include the following:

- Over 50% of attendees became aware of the Faith Gathering via their local Parish Newsletter: 20% became aware of the event via a Church announcement, and a further 20% as a result of a personal invite to the event. This includes those active in parish ministries who were personally invited by letter from the Faith Gathering Committee.
- Over 90% of respondents found it relatively straight forward to book a place at the Faith Gathering, however there was a strong consensus that people would have liked follow up on whether their choice of workshop place was being made available to them.
- Over 90% of respondents found the Faith Gathering Brochure helpful or very helpful in informing their choice of workshops.

In terms of the organisation of and registration for the Faith Gathering, survey respondents were very positive in terms of feedback, with c. 97% people complimenting the organising committee for the tremendous attention to detail in the planning of the event and to the registration, given that a significant number of people were accommodated smoothly without having pre-registered.

In relation to St. Flannan's as a venue for the Saturday Gathering, there was general satisfaction with it. Comments were noted however, regarding accessibility for older people - due to the steps leading to the main assembly hall, also the lack of availability of toilet facilities and the fact that the layout of the various stands was too dispersed and therefore difficult for people to physically avail of all that was on offer. A significant majority of people were delighted with the lunch and refreshments that were available on the day.

Feedback received indicates that both keynote speakers were excellent delivering interesting inputs on being a person of faith in Ireland today, but greatest enthusiasm was around the morning input by Dr. Dermot Ryan. The committee's publication of *Sacred Places in the Diocese of Killaloe* was launched eloquently by Fr Denis Crosby and the

morning events were experienced as vibrant, faith-filled and dynamic. A tangible connection was made between the Sacred Places on our doorstep and the holy people who walked before us. It was clear that sport is an affair of the heart and, to borrow a GAA phrase that 'nothing beats being there'. Like sport, being a person of faith involves heart and soul and for those at the Faith Gathering, nothing beats being there either!

Feedback from the diverse range of workshops was extremely positive, with large numbers of people rating the workshops as being enjoyable, inspiring and interactive. Almost 90% of respondents found the workshops relevant to their daily lives and also useful for their role in their parish.

Looking to the future, 97% of people felt they would attend a Faith Gathering in the future, with the residual recommending that an event such as this be held every 2 years. It is clear that individuals found the workshops enriching and significant numbers would have liked more time to develop the subject area, over and above having 2 keynote speakers on the Saturday. The other sentiment expressed was that perhaps the choice of workshops was too great, and perhaps that if these workshops were recorded on YouTube for example, that they could become a useful resource for more localised gatherings at Parish / Cluster level. Some felt that due to the geography involved, that more local, perhaps county or cluster-based gatherings may be more feasible and attractive for larger numbers. Whilst a Youth Gathering also took place in St. Flannan's on the Saturday, around 15% of survey respondents would have liked the involvement of young people to a greater degree in the range of workshops available because of the energy and fresh perspectives they bring.

Respondents felt that the positive experience of the first Faith Gathering would encourage others to attend future initiatives if they were available. As well as having attractive content for future Gatherings, people expressed the view that the event needed lay-people inviting people to attend at Masses in the weeks leading up to the Faith Gathering. Finally whilst the event provided spiritual nourishment for those actively involved in Church ministries, there was a strongly expressed wish that an outreach in the form of workshops for those who have become disengaged with Church should also be considered for the future.

Two words emerge throughout the evaluation by participants – optimism and joy. It was a moment of renewal and spiritual nourishment for those who attended.

Saturday 14th September – St. Flannan's College – Youth Gathering

55 young people attended the Youth Gathering. Most were involved in the various youth ministries of Lourdes and Taize with a small number from second-level schools. The young people enjoyed the day tremendously and 15 of them have now volunteered to help organise Diocesan Youth events going forward. The registration went very smoothly and worked well having a later start to the main event.

Over half the young people enjoyed Johnny Sommerville from Youth Alpha. His presentation style worked well and his use of video clips was excellent. Elation Ministries was a resounding success and the young people interacted very well with their style and approach. They will definitely be used for future events. There were three young people who gave a testimony about their experience in Lourdes, Taize and Calcutta. They were received very well, they were heartfelt and enthusiastic. Having young people engaging with their peers was a positive move and definitely an approach which will be used again. Fr. Ger Jones gave a presentation on the John Paul II Awards. Again this was received well by those in attendance. The numbers halved in the afternoon due to the All-Ireland Under-21 Final. Bishop Kieran's address was very much appreciated by the young people. It was agreed that for future events a welcome in the morning by the Bishop would be better. The Taize prayer was very much enjoyed by all. It brought together the adults and young people. There was a specific intention to allow the young people to have their own space for the gathering as this was one of the key findings from the Diocesan Youth Survey. The new youth group which will gather in November will decide on such decisions for future events.

The young people enjoyed the lunch and moving from the main dining room to the assembly hall worked as there was no queue.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the following:

1. The evaluations by participants at the Faith Gathering.
 2. Observations of the Organising Committee.
- Dedicate more time than 45 minutes to a workshop.
 - Have one keynote speaker only for a Saturday full day event with the opportunity for individuals to attend up to 3 workshops
 - Consider a compact venue east of the Shannon for a future Gathering with facilities suitable for catering for a group of 750 people
 - Involve a greater number of students / volunteers in preparing rooms for workshops and the tidy up afterwards, also for stewarding / traffic management etc.
 - Have a bigger area available for registration – the main entrance became quite congested with registrations for the morning Gathering.
 - Record workshops in the future for broader dispersal in parishes / clusters
 - More closely aligned planning between those involved in the Youth and Adult Gatherings
 - Closer communication and collegiality between the Diocesan Plan Group and the Faith Gathering Organising Committee.
 - Reconsider the location of display stands. Registration and Displays to be located in the same area.
 - Consideration should be given to more networking opportunities – the time to share ideas on what has worked successfully at local level
 - A reflective session at the end of the day would be useful to summarise key learning from the day.
 - The time of the closing Liturgy (12 noon) on the Sunday did not facilitate the involvement of a broader diocesan congregation who were involved in parish Masses.
 - Given the geography of the Diocese, it is not realistic to expect people to travel 3 consecutive days to Ennis. Advertising needs to be done earlier. Poster campaign, social media, websites and newsletters.

- More work in promoting the Faith and Youth Gathering in the schools and encouraging participation from the students in the schools around the diocese.
- Propose that this evaluation is shared with Bishop Kieran, and that a financial appraisal is done and shared with the organising Committee.